IM ENGLISH
MAY 2016 SESSION
EXAMINERS’ REPORT

The table below outlines the candidates’ results for Intermediate English.

Table 1: Grades obtained by the candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Abs</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Candidates</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>9.12</td>
<td>35.28</td>
<td>17.05</td>
<td>17.59</td>
<td>15.68</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, results for 2016 follow the general trend in relation to previous years. However, a closer consideration also suggests a weaker cohort of candidates this year, as relatively few candidates obtained the higher grades, and there is also a slightly higher fail rate than previously. One palpable concern noted by all the examiners was evidence of a certain superficiality in approach across all sections of the examination. By this, examiners cite examples of rubrics not being thoroughly adhered to, or questions being interpreted at a very basic level, lacking in much ability to argue or thoroughly investigate a given question.

**Oral Paper**

Candidates in general performed to the best of their ability in this section of the exam. The range of topics and the generic nature of the reading passages allowed for a broad familiarity with appropriate vocabulary and grammar structures and a good level of fluency where the task was attempted. Where candidates were too nervous or uncomfortable to speak at length, they received further prompts from the examiners. However, it is to be noted that candidates should attempt to organise their thoughts during the preparation time, enough to be ready to speak about their chosen topic for an extended period of time during their “Long Turn” without relying on the examiner to determine the discussion.

**3.0 Written Paper**

Section A – Language Essay – General Comments

As in previous years, candidates need to bear in mind that using the appropriate format, language and register in relation to the chosen title is important. This year as in previous years, candidates often did not observe basic formats required for report writing or letters, and answers to other titles also lacked evidence of an ability to choose appropriate structures and/or vocabulary suited to the task. Poor spelling and a heavy reliance on formulaic language and/or language chunking also characterised the work from the weaker candidates.

Candidates also need to demonstrate better control over the word count and in sticking to the chosen topic, as very often, the quality of work deteriorated where there was evidence of no planning or organisation of writing. Limited organisation of writing was also frequently evident in issues such as the lack of progression from one idea to the next, the lack of cohesive devices across and within paragraphs, and also occasionally, problematic sentence cohesion, evidenced, for example, in lack of subject-verb agreement, or in the inappropriate use of too many different tenses within a sentence.

a. The one-word title was often interpreted as a narrative, with candidates creating a story around the attempt to escape a kidnapping or prison. In some cases, the narrative went off track as it became a rescue rather than an escape. Vocabulary and language use were considered adequate in the narrative, with some candidates offering a good range of descriptive language. Tenses were sometimes confused in the effort to provide narrative structure, resulting in lack of clarity. A number of candidates attempted a more philosophical discussion of the term ‘escape’. In some cases such responses lacked depth. Some stronger candidates successfully attempted to develop their ideas on the theme by exploring different facets of the word ‘escape’.

Unfortunately, this title generated more than a handful of responses involving gratuitously detailed and graphic descriptions of violence which were often difficult to justify in relation to the title.
b. The key term in this title is "short story", and many candidates attempted to focus appropriately on developing a narrative. The title also indicated that three elements (the old metal box, the grandfather and the attic) should be central to the narrative. In part, this is done to guide candidates towards the avoidance of regurgitating worn themes and stories drawn from current popular fiction and film, as it is felt that at this level, it is almost impossible to successfully reproduce a good quality narrative of a complex plot within a remit of 500 words under exam conditions. It was noted that in some cases the three central elements (the grandfather, the attic and the box) were mentioned only incidentally. The better essays managed to balance out these three elements within the development of their narrative. On the whole, answers stuck to a predictable pattern, often centred on a war theme. At times the narrative went out of point as candidates wrote about flashbacks into the grandfather’s war past/love letters/hidden or lost love. Some narratives attempted more originality, and this effort often corresponded with a better range of vocabulary and structures.

c. Candidates seemed to struggle with this title at a conceptual level, and therefore had difficulty developing their thoughts. All interpretations were considered, and examiners focused on the ability of the candidates to use language appropriately to develop whichever arguments they chose to pursue. However, some interpretations lent themselves more successfully to coherent argumentation than others, and the weaker answers were characterised by a lack of focus on the key idea in the title, resulting in a poorly organised piece of writing. This itself led to weak argumentation, and/or to a concluding opinion which was not well linked with the foregoing presentation of ideas. A number of candidates structured their response as a discussion, thereby sidestepping the direct question indicated in the title; this also resulted in a poorer level of coherence in relation to how the title was interpreted.

d. The letter required candidates to tackle two main points: candidates needed to explain why they thought the parents were wrong and also needed to propose how the disagreements could be tackled / resolved. In the majority of cases candidates described and discussed both areas adequately and at a sufficient length. The better essays managed to give a reason as to why a letter needed to be written in the first place and this showed a sensitivity to the type of text being required here as a letter format. Register was not always appropriate, as particularly evident in the salutations and the address, and the choice of language was generally at its simplest, and least nuanced, possible.

e. The report once again has emerged as the most problematic format to observe. Candidates’ performance in this text type showed evidence of not being particularly sure what a report was for, or how a report might be relevant in certain situations. Clear headings, sub-headings and preambles typical of a report format were rarely present, and perhaps candidates were tempted to interpret “your experiences” as an invitation to slip into a descriptive account of a long train journey. However, here too, descriptive language, when chosen, was limited, trite and lacking in range, so could not add much to the answer as a whole. The register was also often too informal for a report.

f. This title for a descriptive essay generated some good attempts to tackle the key elements in the title, although the element of being “curious” was rarely fully tackled. Overall, the descriptions attempted a range of vocabulary appropriate to the task, if a little predictable. The title’s focus on “curious” was an effort to encourage a less predictable outcome in terms of describing a person, but this element was not fully exploited in most of the answers, resulting in generally average answers.

Comprehension – General Comments

On the whole, the majority of the candidates showed a general understanding of the text and its salient points. Most fared better in the short-answer questions, (b) to (e), and this helped to balance an overall poorer performance noted in the first and last tasks, (a) and (f) respectively. The main weakness centred on the candidates’ difficulty in expressing themselves clearly, in their own words, in the context of the comprehension. This then might have caused problems when candidates tried to demonstrate their comprehension of a text both at the level of basic understanding, and at the level of being able to infer further information, or synthesise information successfully for a summary exercise. Two related issues seem to be hampering candidates’ efforts here. Firstly, basic language errors,
including incomplete sentences and lack of full control over tenses, sometimes obscured clarity in the answers. Secondly, candidates sometimes demonstrated weak comprehension and language skills when they transferred chunks of the original text to their answer without any attempt to elaborate or explain how this section was relevant to their answer. It should be noted that candidates should use their own words to elaborate on an answer as this will clearly show that they have actively understood and can engage with a given text.

a. Overall, candidates fared poorly in this question where they were asked to define a number of terms in the context of the text. Sometimes, they failed to explain the meaning and did not resort to the text for context clues or to check if the definition could fit the context. Some terms proved to be challenging. For example, ‘teeming’ was the most difficult term as it was confused with ‘team’. ‘Seascapes’ also proved to be problematic with candidates referring to sea animals rather than to depictions of the sea. ‘Hooked’ was also often explained out of context.

b. This question required the candidates to explain in what ways the oceans came across as alien-like. A number of candidates correctly referred to the implications of ‘alien’ in this context. Other candidates failed to realise that the term ‘alien planet’ was also metaphorically used in this passage. This, therefore, rendered candidates’ responses incomplete.

c. This question asked the candidates to explain why Cameron considers his earlier decisions in film-making to be mistakes. Most candidates managed to get the gist of this question but then failed to explain themselves thoroughly, with answers being either too brief or too lacking in appropriate detail. This is one particular answer where chunks of the original text were used without further elaboration or explanation.

d. The focus of this question should have been on the ease of merging science fiction and reality. Those who answered correctly managed to bring out the idea of how Cameron intertwined the two in his filming and exploration. Most candidates actually restated the question without further explaining the implication and the significance that Cameron gives to the shift between the two ends of the continuum.

e. Weaker responses focused on the element of luck here, in that Cameron was lucky to have been successful in his career, but they then failed to elaborate on the collective benefit that his work, both as a director and an explorer, imparted to the rest of the world.

f. Summary writing proved to be the most challenging task in the comprehension. Many summaries contained unnecessary details and examples which should not be included in a summary. This was primarily a result of not having read the rubric well and not having understood what was required in terms of content. The candidates resorted to quoting from the text in their responses, thereby failing to show effective understanding of the text or an ability to reformulate the key aspects of the summary.

Section B – Literature

Graham Greene – The Heart of the Matter

a. Unfortunately and a little disappointingly, most of the candidates attempting this question either chose to ignore the importance of the debate on suicide indicated by the title or were unaware of the fact that the question needed a focus on suicide and opted instead to reduce their answer to a write-up on the two priests. The title expected candidates to evidence understanding of how one priest personifies the belief that suicide prevents the sinner from repenting and praying for forgiveness and thus possibly earning salvation while the other priest reflects a more compassionate understanding suggesting that the salvation or otherwise of one who commits suicide ultimately depends on God’s love and mercy. It is the shift in the official position of the Roman Catholic church from interpreting suicide as one’s decision to embrace despair over salvation to the acceptance that one’s decision to commit suicide may be the result of a confused mind and therefore the individual may not be fully culpable that should have been the central debate in the answers. Very few essays presented this position and extended it to show how the priests exemplify these challenging and contrasting interpretations of suicide.
b. Most of the candidates attempting this question were ‘correct’ at the more superficial level of interpreting the title. The majority of the essays presented Scobie as he appears at the beginning of the novel (just and incorruptible), supporting this characterisation of Scobie with valid evidence. In contrast, candidates wrote about what characters like Wilson, Yusef and Helen think of Scobie. Up to this level of argumentation, most candidates were essentially correct and their efforts were deservedly acknowledged; however, few answers took the discussion further to show that as Scobie changes he actually approaches (and consequently justifies) the initial ‘wrong’ impression these characters have of him. For example, Wilson is initially wrong to assume that Scobie is in the Syrian’s pocket but eventually this becomes true, and Yusef is initially wrong to assume that Scobie is corruptible like all others but even this becomes true.

c. Candidates had no major problem contextualising the passage. Many candidates then proceeded to write about Wilson in a manner that did not reflect any grounding in or concern with the gobbet. A good number of candidates departed from the main focus of the gobbet question by turning the focus instead into an essay on Wilson. Admittedly what they wrote about Wilson was generally correct but the answers tended to manifest a lack of discipline in organising a gobbet answer from specific to generic and to sustain the importance of the excerpt. Many answers were also weak in discussing themes that emerge from the given passage.

**Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – Purple Hibiscus**

a. Generally, candidates performed acceptably well in this question. Most of the candidates made the right choices by focusing on elements of the natural world and proceeded to discuss the symbolism of these elements in a manner that is consonant and coherent with the over-arching arguments/themes in the novel. Some candidates ignored part of the question, undermining their effort as a result. In this case some candidates opted to include elements such as the figurines, the missal or the schedules which are irrelevant.

b. Most candidates answering this question got a lot of things right when exploring the relationship between Kambili and Jaja; however, the ease with which the novel may be reduced to binary opposites tends to blinker candidates into compartmentalising things in a rather simplistic manner. It is correct to conclude that for the children life at Enugu tends to be negative and that at Nsukka positive but it is wrong to necessarily equate this with, for example, a better relationship between Kambili and Jaja at Nsukka. In fact, the opposite may be argued since Kambili and Jaja embrace the challenge Nsukka offers at a completely different pace facing different challenges in their coming of age process. The relationship between the two is even more tenuous during Jaja’s time in prison. Many answers got the basics right but failed to show a command of the novel that permitted candidates to argue beyond the obvious.

c. A number of candidates opting for the gobbet answer on Purple Hibiscus did not do particularly well with some even getting the contextualisation wrong. The gobbet concerned the poisoning of Eugene which process is not narrated explicitly in the novel. Even though it was not immediately important to their answer, many candidates attempted to determine the exact point when this process started, suggesting ideas that contradict evidence in the novel. Also, too many candidates were mainly focused on writing about the many events in the novel where Eugene’s behaviour is unacceptable in an effort to justify what the mother does and the moment shown in the gobbet. The better answers were more concerned with the contrast between the initial lack of stature of Beatrice and her reality at this stage; the implications of such an act; the different reactions to the news and why. Some candidates used the gobbet effectively, writing both about the instant and the link between the past and the future of the characters involved as well as themes such as punishment, the role of women in the novel and coming of age.

**Robert Bolt – A Man for All Seasons**

a. This was the least chosen of the questions on the play. As expected the majority of the candidates opting for this question focused on the pressure on More to align himself with
what was happening. Most answers showed a tendency to ignore pressure from family members and to be exclusively concerned with insistence from high profile characters from the religiopolitical context. Content was generally valid and organised in an acceptable manner but essay bodies were often close to feeling like unrelated mini write-ups on different characters and their relationship with More.

b. Many of the answers to this question were rather disappointing because it seems that candidates were not sensitive enough to the title focus – the universal aspects of human beings and how these are exemplified through the different roles of the Common Man. The few better essays were driven by different paragraphs focusing separately on themes/ideas such as survival instinct, indifference towards others, coping with guilt and the support of these ideas through various roles played by the Common Man. The lesser quality essays tended to be concerned with paragraphs on the Common Man as the steward, the boatman, the jailer, the publican etc. and were limited to what the character does in the play.

c. Very few candidates opted for the gobbet question on A Man for All Seasons. Answers generally suggested candidates understood where the speeches appear in the play and what the discussion is about. Candidates tended to write about Cromwell and More and content was correct though not always immediately relevant to this particular gobbet question. What most answers lacked was usually a strong grounding in what each of the characters says here, how this is consistent or otherwise with the characters elsewhere in the play, and the relationship that the play develops between the two.

Ian McEwan – Atonement

a. Most of the candidates opted to attempt this question. The majority of the answers were mainly driven by narrative with a clear imbalance towards narrating the initial incidents in the novel. Too many essays had separate paragraphs essentially focusing on narrating the incident at the fountain, the library scene, the reading of the letter and the accusation of Robbie followed by a single paragraph on what happens later. Few answers showed a sustained effort to distance oneself from paraphrasing/narration to foreground argumentation. Most candidates were exclusively concerned with Briony and/or ignored completely the idea that the essay title expected them to explore ‘...the transition from childhood innocence into adulthood in various ways.’

b. The candidates attempting this question tended to do acceptably well. Content was generally relevant, doing justice to the relationship between Briony and Cecilia in the novel. Answers explored the motherly role Cecilia takes, the similarity between Cecilia and Briony in that they are both at a transition point in their life and even touched on the fact that in different ways both are mature and immature. Balance tended to be right in a good number of essays and most of the answers were also organised in a manner that was not taxing on the reader to follow.

c. The candidates opting for this question did acceptably well up to a certain point. Contextualisation tended to be correct as were most of the points made on how the passage relates to Briony’s desire to be a writer. There were also some acceptable extensions into how Briony’s imagination and writing determine or at least colour the main events in the novel; however, very few candidates profited from the passage to explore the more challenging ideas that emerge from the passage such as the ‘struggle between good and bad’, that she ‘need not judge’, that ‘there did not have to be a moral’; ‘wickedness and scheming’, ‘confusion and misunderstanding’ and ‘the failure to grasp the simple truth’ among others. Candidates shied away from engaging with any of these themes which was a pity given the possibilities the passage offers.